

Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani and Members of the Committee, I'm Pam Green, the president and CEO of Easterseals Redwood serving greater Cincinnati and northern KY. The 450 employees at our affiliate serve more 7,000 families each year, including people with disabilities, veterans and people who are economically disadvantaged.

I want to personally thank our southwest Ohio Representatives Cindy Abrams and Rachel Baker and Chairwoman Schmidt for bringing forward HB 141 which will so positively impact children and families with disabilities.

I am a proud resident of Cincinnati, and I am also proud to have grown up across Ohio's southern border in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. For people like me, one of the things you grow up knowing to be FACT is that Ohio has a stronger safety net than KY, and that Ohio better provides for the children who are its most vulnerable citizens.

So when Easterseals serving Greater Cincinnati merged with Redwood of Northern KY in 2022, I was shocked to learn that there was one area where we weren't doing better in Ohio.

In Kentucky and nearly 20 other states, families of children with complex medical needs have access to licensed medical childcare through Prescribed Pediatric Extended Care, PPEC, a Medicaid-funded service that pays for skilled nursing and therapeutic supports in an early education setting.

I want you to imagine for just a moment that you have a child born with a disability that requires continual medical or technological intervention.

You use up all of your FMLA while they are in the NICU, and maybe your spouse does as well. Then your child is released from the hospital...and you have nowhere to go. Childcare centers aren't set up with nursing staff, and even if you can afford private nursing—which few can--you can't afford it around the clock. If you qualify for a Home Care waiver, congratulations--and good luck finding a home nurse in this job market, or one who is willing to take on a child whose health conditions brings considerable risk.

That's the challenge faced every day by thousands of Ohio families. But it doesn't have to be like that.

Across the river at Easterseals Redwood's medical childcare and five-star early childhood education site, families can enroll their children with complex medical needs in a childcare center supported by a team of nurses and therapists. Their children are learning and hitting milestones alongside typically developing peers. Parents can continue to work knowing

their child is safe and cared for. The frequency of hospitalizations goes down, and costs of unnecessary hospitalizations are reduced.

We at Easterseals Redwood are determined that what side of the river families of kids with disabilities live on doesn't determine what services they have access to. And it matters: as we seek to grow the great state of Ohio, I have two board members who moved from Cincinnati to northern KY because their children with complex medical needs didn't have access to medical childcare in Ohio.

We have so many Ohio families on the waitlist for waivers that need PPEC. Their child's medical needs require nursing supervision for daily care, so childcares and preschools can't serve them. But some are not medically fragile enough to qualify for a Home Care waiver that funds private duty nursing. So they wait, hoping a DD waiver slot opens. Meanwhile the family struggles with lost income and high medical bills, and the child, isolated by their medical complexity, misses those crucial early childhood education classroom moments.

You've heard from Reps. Baker and Abrams about the economic benefits of implementing this program: the cost for PPEC averages around \$300 per day per child. One night in the NICU at Childrens costs about \$5,700. In 2022, CCHMC estimates the cost of avoidable hospital days was \$22.5 million.

Today, you are going to hear from families we serve, as well as families who desperately want their children to have access to services like those we offer.

You will hear a consistent theme: they want to work and they want to feel confident their child is safe. They want their children to experience the joys of play and friendship, to benefit from being included with typically developing kids.

We have a solution that is that special unicorn legislators seek, one that strengthens families and saves taxpayers money.

I ask that you please support HB 141, and I'm happy to answer any questions.